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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000873

SIPDIS

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LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

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TAGS: PGOV PTER FAID CE NO JA LTTE

SUBJECT: Norwegians set to try again with Tigers;
President criticizes the group's latest demands

Refs: (A) OpsCenter-Colombo 05/24/03 telecon

- (B) Colombo 868, and previous

(U) Classified by Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of
Mission. Reasons: 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: In the latest effort to convince the Tigers to come to the Tokyo conference, a Norwegian envoy is working with the GSL on ways to meet the group's demands re control of assistance funds. Sharply curbing the GSL's room for compromise on the matter, the president has harshly criticized the Tigers' demand for an interim structure in the north/east. In other news, the Tigers have been earning some rare plaudits for their recent meeting with eastern Muslims and their sending of flood aid to the south. Although the GoN is giving it another try, getting the Tigers to Tokyo still seems a long shot. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) NORWEGIAN ENVOY ARRIVES: Norwegian envoy Erik Solheim arrived in Colombo on May 25 in the latest effort to convince the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to come to the Tokyo donors conference, which is scheduled for June 9-10. (Note: The LTTE announced in late April that it was pulling out of the peace talks and would not go to Tokyo. Since that time, Norwegian and Japanese officials have been engaged in a full-court press aimed at convincing the LTTE to reconsider.) From what Mission understands, Solheim was in close consultation with GSL officials, including Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, during the first part of his visit. The focus of these meetings was to fine-tune the government's reaction to the latest LTTE demand that an "interim administrative structure" be set up in the north/east to distribute assistance funding. (Note: The LTTE demands that whatever structure is formed also be basically under its control -- See Reftels.) Solheim is expected to take the GSL's counter-proposals to the LTTE-controlled Wanni region soon and review them with Tiger officials at that time. (Note: We have heard late reports that the essence of the GSL's proposals have already been provided to the LTTE and that Solheim will review the details whenever he visits the Wanni.)

3. (C) (((Note: The GSL's exact counter-proposals have not been publicized as of yet. Per Septel, however, we understand that the government is recommending to the LTTE that a new entity be created to deal with all aspects of development and reconstruction in the NE, replacing the joint Sub-Committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs for the North and East, "SIHRN." The new entity would be quite complex, with various units, including an "apex" council. The general idea is that the LTTE would have a "major" role in the delivery of assistance in the NE, but not a "majority" voice. End Note.)))

4. (SBU) (((Note: The Department's May 23 announcement that the Deputy Secretary would be attending Tokyo received a great deal of press play in Sri Lanka. Local reaction was highly favorable. A media reaction cable is being sent Septel.)))

5. (SBU) PRESIDENT HITS OUT: Sharply curbing the GSL's room for compromise, the president has harshly criticized the Tigers' demand for an interim structure in the north/east. President Kumaratunga, addressing a foreign correspondents' dinner late May 23, flatly rejected the Tiger demands for an interim administration and stated: "I have not heard of any self-respecting sovereign government anywhere in the world agreeing to act outside its own constitution at the request of anyone." The president went on to criticize the Norwegian effort as going beyond facilitation and stated that she did not know what Japan's exact role in the process was. The president's People's Alliance (PA) party also hit out hard against the LTTE's demands and starkly warned the PM about the matter, stating, "The PA rejects totally the LTTE's demands and warns the Prime

Minister that if he continues, his government will be in peril." In the meantime, the radical, anti-peace process Janantha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) party also joined in the hue and cry, characterizing any attempt to create an interim administration as nothing but a move toward "Tamil Eelam" in disguise. In its statement, the JVP slammed the government, claiming that the GSL had achieved nothing in its months of negotiations with the LTTE, and accused "Western interests" of acting in concert with the LTTE to "trap" the government.

16. (SBU) SOME POSITIVE NEWS RE THE LTTE: Of late, most reports regarding the LTTE's activities have been highly negative. (Note: Much of the reporting, for example, has focused on the group's pullout from the talks and the Tokyo conference, and on clear indications that the group is assassinating Tamil opponents, etc.) There have been some slight recent bright spots, however, including the fact that local Tiger leaders met with local Muslim leaders in the eastern town of Mutur on May 21. (Note: Mutur was the scene of serious communal violence between pro-LTTE Tamils and Muslims in mid-April.) In a show of communal solidarity, the two sides discussed ways to avoid conflict in the future, even agreeing to form a committee on the matter. (Note: FYI. Muslim leader Rauf Hakeem has reviewing peace process issues with the Norwegian government in Oslo for the past several days.)

17. (SBU) In other positive news re the LTTE, the Tigers donated six truckloads of dry rations (rice, lentils, etc.) to flood victims in the south on May 22. LTTE political wing officials accompanied the aid -- which was reportedly worth about USD 35,000 -- on its trek to the south. This gesture netted significant (and rare) positive press coverage for the LTTE in the south.

18. (C) COMMENT: Although the Norwegians are giving it another try, getting the Tigers to Tokyo still appears a long shot. The pressure on the GSL is considerable, with the LTTE setting tough conditions on one flank and the president/JVP criticizing whatever the government does on the other. Coming up with a workable compromise on aid delivery in the north/east that is politically palatable in the south (and legal per Sri Lanka's complex constitution) normally would take weeks and months to work out. It is certainly very, very difficult to do so in several days. All that said, the fact that Tokyo is moving forward and that the U.S. will be there has given the government more breathing space to try to work things out. END COMMENT.

19. (U) Minimize considered.

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